



Bathhouse Building a Legacy of the New Deal

You might not know exactly what the New Deal was, but chances are it affects your life today. Are some of your savings protected by the FDIC (Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation)? Ever heard of the Social Security Administration? Do you know an older person who lived through the Great Depression and was employed by the WPA (Works Progress Administration)? If so, then you know about some of the social and economic programs enacted during 1933-1941 by the Franklin D. Roosevelt Administration.

The Aquatic Park Bathhouse was a joint project of the City of San Francisco and the WPA. Construction of this imposing structure began in 1936 and it opened to the public in 1939. Located at the water's edge, it is a unique structure designed in the Streamline Moderne style and resembles an ocean liner.

The exterior and interior of the Bathhouse building contain many beautiful and unique works of art created by artists employed through the Federal Arts Project (FAP), another New Deal program.

Artist Hilaire Hiler spent two years in the late 1930s creating 5,000 square feet of interior murals. The walls are covered with Hiler's vision of the submerged continents of Mu and Atlantis. Brilliantly colored fish, mythical sea creatures, and bizarre, enlarged microorganisms swim and float in the bluegreen depths of the sea.

Since 1951 the building has been home to the San Francisco Maritime Museum and the country's first senior center. The museum was operated by the San Francisco Maritime Museum Association until it was transferred to the National Park Service in 1978.

Closed in 2006 for an extensive restoration project, the building is now partially reopened. The original stainless steel-clad windows and doors, and roofing has been replaced, and restoration of the interior murals is ongoing.

Over the years, moisture leaked through the old windows and loosened the mural fabric and damaged the underlying plaster walls. Mural conservator Ann Rosenthal cleaned and repaired the murals around the windows, applied a protective coating, and then reattached them to the restored walls. She is continuing the work on other sections of the murals.

We hope you enjoy visiting this wonderful public building and remember the New Dealers who had a hand in creating it. We salute the forethought and hard work of those who left us a legacy of grand buildings, massive dams, wilderness trails, artwork, and documentation: representation worthy of the far-ranging and eclectic spirit of the American people.



Opening Day, Maritime Museum, May 28, 1951. NPS Photo, A12.24,411.13n